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STATINTL

M. 54,890
S. 55,101

OCT 20 1965

Nation Would Benefit From Group To Watch Over Activities Of CIA

Sen. Stephen A. Young isn't the first person who has suggested that a Congressional watchdog committee ought to be established to oversee the Central Intelligence Agency, nor will he be the last.

Such proposals have come up from time to time, especially when, as occurred recently, the CIA is caught with another one of its slips showing, but the proposals are just as regularly knocked down. The CIA has powerful friends on Capitol Hill, and most of them seem willing to let the intelligence organization go on making its own mistakes in its own way.

But Ohio Democrat Young's idea is still a good one. The trouble is that when the CIA slips it's the United States government that gets bruised and oftentimes battered. The recently-revealed attempted bribery by a CIA agent of Lee Kuan Yew (now of Singapore, then of Malaysia), when the agent got caught trying to buy secrets, is a minor peccadillo compared to some of the major imbroglios for which the CIA has been responsible.

Everyone, as Senator Young declares, "is aware of the damage to our prestige caused by CIA bungling of the U-2 incident of five years ago and of the disastrous role CIA opera-

tives played in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion."

Concededly, the CIA, as a secret organization, can't trumpet its successes when others blast its failures. And it may well be, as CIA spokesmen assert, that the outfit often gets blamed for things which others have done.

Still and all, no government organization, at least in a democracy, ought to be answerable only to itself. Supervision is always necessary, even if, as in the CIA's case, that supervision still might not keep the organization from ever making a mistake. And there is no reason to assume that congressmen are going to blab the CIA's precious secrets. A joint Congressional watchdog agency has been overseeing the Atomic Energy Commission since just after World War II, and no one has ever accused any of its members of security violations.

Similarly, Congress has the right and the responsibility to have at least a few of its trusted members know what's going on in the sacrosanct precincts of the CIA. The legislative branch can't administer an executive agency, but no executive agency can claim absolution from any legislative purview.